

# BILLY WHISKERS

By FRANCIS MONTGOMERY

The cat on the fence continued with his speech:

"I am president of the Dog and Cat Information Bureau," he said, "and we are holding a meeting tonight in a big empty warehouse that has just been finished for the storage of ammunition. We have a very large membership—five hundred dogs and cats belonging. Having no newspaper, we meet to exchange the news of the day. If we did not, we would not know what was going on in the world outside our city. As it is, we are well posted, for dogs and cats journey here from all over the world to speak at our meetings and to tell us what is happening in the countries from which they come. Now I hope all of you will favor us by speaking at our meeting tonight. It begins at 12 o'clock, and I will come and escort you to our place of meeting. We start rather late, as it is easier for us to steal away from our homes unmolested at that hour than at any other. Many of our members are children's pets and can't get away until they are tucked in bed, as they keep such close track of them."

Billy stood up and, bowing to the line of cats on the fence and to the heads of the dogs under the fence, he began:

"Friends—and countrymen, we thank you for your courtesy and kind invitation to speak before your club this evening. This will be a pleasure to me, provided we can escape our host and are not locked in the shed. But I think I can promise you we will be there, for if we should be shut in the shed my good strong head can butt down and make short work of a board or two that would give us access to the alley. Should we be tied, we can easily chew the rope in two. Consequently I think you may expect us at the appointed hour if some one will kindly show us the way to where your meeting is to be held."

Just then Mr. Stubbs opened the back door and stepped into the back yard.

"Bless my soul! I never saw so many dogs and cats in my life. I must be seeing things, for surely there can't be that many cats and dogs in this neighborhood!" He rubbed his eyes to make sure he had seen a line of cats sitting on them."

top of the fence and a line of dogs peeping under the fence. But when he looked again there was not a single cat or dog to be seen. The only ones he could discover were Stubbs and Burton, both apparently asleep outside the shed door.

"Well, I declare, that is the most peculiar thing that ever happened to me in my life! I distinctly saw dozens of cats and dogs, and now I can't see one. Height! My old eyes must be playing tricks with me." And that was all he thought about it. He had come out to shut the chums in the shed, but seeing them all there fast asleep, he decided to let them sleep on and not shut them in the shed that night.

"He really is an accommodating old fellow, isn't he?" said Billy. "To leave us out all night! It will save him a broken snail door, though he will never know it."

"What time do you suppose it is?" asked Stubbs.

"From the height of the moon, I should say it must be about half past ten," answered Burton.

"That will give us an hour and a half to think up what we are going to talk about at the club tonight. What are you going to tell them, Billy?" said Stubbs.

"I really don't know. Guess I will wait for the inspiration of the moment."

"You better think up something extra exciting. Why not tell them about the time you were blown out of the trenches and lost a piece of your tail? Or, better yet, when you broke into the German headquarters and buried the great Hindenburg himself?" advised Burton.

"That would be as interesting as anything I could recount. What are you two fellows going to relate to them?"

"I think I shall tell them about our trip on the canal boat in France," replied Burton.

"And I plan to describe to them the Dog Hospital and tell how it was blown up by the Germans," added Stubbs.

"It is quite an idea," said Billy, "their having a club like this. It keeps them in touch with all that goes on, throughout the whole country. I am quite anxious to see what it is like."

As the hands of the clock in the Ferry station pointed to 12 they heard a loud meow and, looking up, they saw the big cat that had first appeared to them sitting on the fence.

"Well, friends, here I am! Are you ready to start?"

"All ready!" replied Billy. "But how are you to get out?"

"We will show you," said Stubbs, whereupon Billy hopped up on the packing box and from the top of the roof of the shed and then jumped down into the alley.

"Very cleverly done!" commended the cat—whose name, by the way, was Tiger, because he was striped like one. "But what puzzles me is how your friends are to get out, as the jump is too high for them."

"Too high for them, did you say? Nothing is too high for a dog that has done police stunts in France. Listen! Did you not hear something hit the fence and then the scratch of nails on the boards? Well, that is my friend Stubby running up the side of the fence. From the sounds, evidently he had not got enough of a running start and fell back. But here he comes! See his head appearing over the top!"

In a second Stubby appeared, balancing himself on the ridge of the fence. The next moment he stood beside them. At the same time Burton also ran down a post of the fence.

"Now we are all here, we'll have to hurry to allow for having to step to hide when we see watchmen and strange dogs. Not knowing any of our members, you will have to be careful not to attack them, thinking they are enemies. I will give you the password. It is three short, sharp barks. On seeing another dog, all our members bark this password, and if the dog they bark at does not reply in like manner they know it is a stray dog. The cats all give three caterwauls in the same manner."

"Oh!" exclaimed Burton, "there comes a brute of a bulldog, whose mouth looks as if it were just watering for the back of a cat. Unless he gives the password quickly I shall take no chance, but run up this tree. I am within a whisker almost any dog but a bulldog."

"How! Wow! Wow!" replied the bulldog as he approached them.

"How! Wow! Wow!" replied Stubby, while Billy barked "Bark! Bark! Bark!" and Burton meowed "Mew! Mew! Mew!" By this time the bulldog had come up to them, and Tiger introduced them, telling the dog what distinguished friends he was meeting.

Tiger found him most agreeable and that his looks really belied him, just as the appearance of many persons does. As they all trotted down by the dock, Stubby and the bulldog ran side by side, while Billy and the two cats ran on ahead. Presently Stubby barked: "Oh, Billy! What do you think? Our new friend here says he is the full brother of Booger, the bulldog that belonged to Captain Percy, and that he was in the Dog Hospital at the same time we were there, laid up with a broken leg."

"The world is small, after all. To think we should meet over here just after seeing your brother in France!"

"Hiss!" warned Tiger. "No more talking until we are inside the building. We are approaching the warehouse now and we must not let the watchman see us. The only way we can get in through a window in the basement that has been left open by mistake. There is a broad plank running from the window down to the floor that the men use with their wheelbarrows to carry out the dirt. It must be very handy to get out. We all could jump down, but few of our club members can jump up so high. None of us can jump like Stubby here."

"How slow!" barked the bulldog in a low voice, as a man with a lantern turned into the alley down which they all were running. "Hide quickly until he passes!"

As he passed them, they heard him muttering to himself: "I never saw so many cats and dogs in my life as I have seen tonight in this alley. I did not know there were so many in the world! And when I get up to where I saw them they are all gone—disappeared—vanished. They must be the ghosts of the dead-and-gone dogs

and cats that used to live in the warehouse."

Just then the bulldog, whose name was Buster, sneezed, which so startled the man that he ran as if he had been shot.

"Nice brave watchman they have!" said Billy.

"Plague take my nose!" said Buster. "It is so short and stubby that all the dust gets into it and to save my life I can't help sneezing. And I always do it at the most inopportune moment."

Just then a whistle sounded, and Tiger said: "We must hurry! There goes the 12 o'clock whistle at the factory down the river. It is the signal for the night shift to come on."

The warehouse being near where they were, in about five minutes they found themselves entering the low window Buster had spoken about. When they looked inside it was pitch dark and as if they were looking into a coal pit. But, their eyes being such that they could see in the dark, they had no trouble in walking the plank, and soon found themselves on the floor of the cellar. It looked a black square in shape and there was absolutely nothing in it, Tiger said, still in the distance they could see black shapes moving about.

"What in the world is over in that corner?" asked Billy.

"Oh, they are only wharf rats," replied Tiger. "Shall we charge down on them just for fun?"

"Say we do! But I hate rats as I do poison," said Billy.

"So do I, but they are our natural enemies," answered Tiger. "Ours, too," from Stubby.

"You stand and watch the fun, while we rat haters kill a few," suggested Tiger.

"Very well!"

"When I say 'three,' all of you run for the bunch and kill as many as you can," instructed Tiger.

For the next ten minutes you never in all your life heard such squealing, snarling and snapping of teeth as there was in that cellar.

Two unusually big cats and two dogs, all bound to kill rats, were fighting these fierce wharf rats. But what made the battle such a bloody one was that wharf rats are braver than house rats and will fight to the death when attacked. Being large, and having long, sharp teeth, more often than not they get the better of ordinary cats and dogs that are sicked on them. In less than fifteen minutes hundreds of rats had been killed, for Buster was a noted rat killer. All he did was to open his jaws, grab a rat in the middle of its back, give his head a shake, and the rat's back was broken. Then he tossed that rat aside and served another one likewise.

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